

Good Morning,

My name is Erica Nowakowski and I am Director of Justice Initiatives at the Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven. Our institute provides administrative, research, policy and planning support to the state's Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC).

I am here today to urge your support for raised Bill #7389, **An Act Concerning Confidentiality In The Case Of A Discretionary Transfer Of A Juvenile's Case To The Regular Criminal Docket And Implementing The Recommendations Of The Juvenile Justice Policy And Oversight Committee**. This bill contains the recommendations adopted by the JJPOC at their meetings in January and February of this year.

The JJPOC has been highly successful in accomplishing important goals for the state's juvenile justice system. Through its efforts, since 2015, the incarceration of children has been reduced by more than 50%. In fact, Connecticut leads the country in this important area.

Additionally, diversion of children from contact with the justice system has increased by more than 20% thanks to community and school-based alternative initiatives. As well, we are seeing real progress at reducing recidivism for children in the state's juvenile probation system.

The JJPOC relies upon research and data driven efforts in making their annual recommendations to the legislature. All research continues to conclude that incarceration of children results in higher recidivism rates and that even minimal contact with the police and courts can cause children to escalate their involvement in crime. This year's recommendations are made with this research in mind.

Bill #7389 will move Connecticut further ahead in our reform efforts by accomplishing the following critical objectives:

- First, the removal of youth whose cases are transferred to the adult court from custody in an adult correctional facility by July 1, 2021. Over the next year, the JJPOC will study this matter and submit a plan to accomplish this critical change to the legislature in January of 2020.

- Secondly, Bill #7389 requires all juvenile correctional facilities to adopt a set of recommended best practices in the areas of suicidality, trauma, mental health, substance abuse, family relations, and childhood abuse and neglect. The need for the adoption of these practices have been made eminently clear in a very extensive report issued in January of this year by the Office of the Child Advocate. While every effort must be made to limit the use of incarceration of children, we have a strong moral obligation to ensure that conditions of confinement reflect our values of fairness and decency and ensure safety and critical services in all public and private secure juvenile justice facilities.
- Third, this bill will complete our goal of removing status offenders, truants, runaways, and those out of control of their parents from the juvenile court system. The removal of court involvement of status offenders is consistent with the national research findings that even limited contact with the justice system may increase the risk of further negative behavior on the part of these youth. Truants, which accounted for more than 70% of all status offenders, were removed from the juvenile court system in August of 2017. In effect with the passage of this bill, the remaining categories, which include runaways and those out of control of their parents, will be removed from the court by July 1 of 2020. Instead of court referral, this children and families will be referred to social services in the communities where they live.

The bill does contain some technical errors in the effective dates and some wording omissions. I have attached a fact sheet, which identifies in each section both what the JJPOC intended by making this recommendation and the technical changes needed.

Members of the Judiciary Committee can feel free to contact the Tow Youth Justice Institute with any questions regarding the JJPOC's work. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.